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COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
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Agenda item 3

# IMPROVED COORDINATION OF CONFERENCES WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM: IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 43/222 B, PARAGRAPH 4 (f)

## Note by the Secretariat

1. In resolution 43/222 B of 21 December 1988, the General Assembly decided to retain the Committee on Conferences as a permanent subsidiary organ of the Assembly, and established the Committee's terms of reference. In paragraph 4 (f) of the resolution, the Committee is mandated to make recommendations, as appropriate, to the Assembly on means to ensure an improved coordination of conferences within the United Nations system, including conference services and facilities, and to conduct the appropriate consultations in that regard.

2. Pursuant to that part of its mandate, during its substantive session in August 1989, the Committee requested a report from the Secretary-General on the current status of coordination, which would form the basis of further discussions during its series of substantive meetings in 1990. Subsequently, the Committee adopted a biennial approach to its programme of work and decided to place the matter on its agenda for 1991 as a meetings-related item.

3. At the same 1989 meeting, the Committee requested the views of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), since ACC was seized in general with matters of policy and coordination within the system. The Committee on Conferences therefore requested the Secretary-General, as Chairman of ACC, to provide comments on the subject of the system-wide coordination of conference activities, as well as information on current or envisaged practical arrangements in that area.

4. When it met in October 1989, the Organizational Committee of ACC discussed the request of the Committee on Conferences and decided, on behalf of ACC, to refer the matter to the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP).

5. As a consequence of the ACC request, the subject "coordination of conferences within the United Nations system" was added to the provisional agenda of the 1990 session of IAMLADP, which met in June 1990 at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (FAO) in Rome.

6. In preparation for that meeting, the Department of Conference Services at United Nations Headquarters conducted a preliminary review of the current system of coordination. The review revealed that there was no consultation among the specialized agencies and the United Nations on the timing of meetings and conferences. Although the meetings of the principal organs of the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) were included in the biennial calendar of conferences submitted to the General Assembly, those meetings were organized by the agencies themselves. Some coordinating role was carried out by the United Nations offices at Vienna and Geneva when United Nations facilities were used for large conferences of agencies based there.

7. The representatives of United Nations Headquarters presented the request of ACC at the June 1990 meeting of IAMLADP, and expressed their understanding that a review of inter-agency coordination had been recommended with a view to ascertaining whether the establishment of a consultation procedure in respect of the scheduling of conferences and large meetings would lead to a more efficient use of conference resources within the United Nations system.

8. IAMLADP discussed the matter extensively. Several organizations explained that the timing of the meetings of their governing bodies, the number of sessions required, as well as other meetings requirements were determined by statutory and technical considerations. Others explained that, in order to avoid overlapping, they refrained from concentrating the discussion of resolutions and issues during the same meeting periods when other agencies were discussing similar subjects. They further noted that delegations from the member States would themselves be scarce if bodies discussing similar subjects were to meet at the same time. The European-based organizations also pointed out that the overlapping of meetings in the United Nations system had created a greater demand for the services of temporary language staff than was available on the freelance market, bringing about competition for the services of those staff within the United Nations family.

9. It was evident from the discussion that a need to improve the coordination of conferences within the United Nations system clearly existed. However, given the mandates handed to individual organizations by their governing bodies, which specified the timing of their conference schedules as well as the subject-matters to be taken up, it was essential to ensure that the question was addressed carefully, especially at duty stations where a large number of agencies were based.

10. IAMLADP decided that, in order to properly and more thoroughly address the issue, the specialized agencies should submit information in respect of their meetings and conferences in 1988-1989. United Nations Headquarters would compile the information received, which would serve as a basis for a paper to be discussed at the September 1991 meeting of IAMLADP. The agencies would indicate any scheduling difficulties they had encountered and present suggestions on possible action that could be taken to promote improved coordination within the United Nations system. The purpose of the study would be to assess the possibility of increasing inter-agency consultation on the coordination of conferences and large meetings with a view to attaining optimum use of conference resources by decreasing overlapping, allowing for some inter-agency exchanges of conference-servicing staff, and minimizing competition among United Nations agencies with regard to the recruitment of freelance staff. The results of the study will be presented to IAMLADP in September 1991.

11. IAMLADP will report conclusions and observations made at that session to ACC, and the views of ACC thereon will then be conveyed to the Committee on Conferences at the earliest opportunity.

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